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ORAL EXPOSITION FOR COLLEGES AND HIGH SCHOOLS

SECOND ARTICLE

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Since the publication of the article "Oral Composition a Basis for Written,"¹ I have received many inquiries concerning the technique of presentation in the longer theme work of the advanced high-school student and of the beginner in college or university composition. I shall attempt to answer them more fully in this article than has been possible in the brief letters that I have sent to those interested.

That there is little difference between college theme work and advanced high-school work under the best conditions of the latter seems to need no proving other than the facts that inquiries have been made by college men, and that many colleges waive part of the initial course in composition where the Freshmen concerned have received good high-school training in expression of their thoughts. One might go farther and quote the opinions of teachers actually engaged in college work, or even cite the example of one college that has revised its whole Freshman course in composition and rebuilt it upon the general plan laid down in my article mentioned above. But I must pass over the grace and come to the meat, letting each guest invoke his own god in his own way for his own feast.

Let it be understood that the following explanation is supplementary to the article "Oral Composition a Basis for Written." As a consequence, if taken as a complete unit in itself, it will seem somewhat scant in the general technique of oral composition. However, it should not be so taken. Only let it be remembered that the method of procedure in the oral work as planned in that article is the same for all forms of discourse.

¹ *English Journal*, June, 1914.

I have purposely given the assignments conversational tone, having retained throughout the attitude of instructor talking to students; so that the assignments as stated here can be taken over verbatim if the busy teacher has not time to develop the ideas in his own language. If anyone finds the tone too familiar or too unlearned in style, then let him adapt his language to the classroom in which he finds himself.

The aim of this article is to cover the technical difficulties that arise in the teaching of exposition.

In regard to subjects for themes, I think no one needs help from me. We shall assume then that each student in the class to be instructed has selected an interesting topic to write about—one that is interesting to him, to the other students, and to the teacher. Do not forget the teacher.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT

Let this be the first assignment:

(1) Make a tentative—at least tentative—formulation of the topic sentence. (2) Write down in sentence form the main topics of the development of the thought of the topic sentence, numbering the topics consecutively with the largest signs used in the outline notation. That is, if you use the notation tion, I, A, 1, a, number the topics with Roman numerals. (3) Write in one sentence the conclusion, if any, to which these topics seem to lead. (4) Examine the main topics of the development (I, II, etc.) to see whether your development proceeds in a natural manner, if there is one for it, or whether you have the most important points in the most important positions; i.e., last place and first place, in the order named. (5) Having found the best order of topics, rewrite the outline on a sheet, or a sheet and a half, of theme paper, in this order: Title, Theme Sentence, Point I, Point II, Point III, Point IV, Point V, Conclusion. Here is a sample outline. Use it for a guide to your arrangement:

SHALL WE INCREASE OUR ARMAMENT?

The question of increasing our armament was first raised of late by Congressman Gardner, of Massachusetts, in a series of speeches delivered at various points throughout this country.

I. He said that our defenses were inadequate.

II. The investigation made by the *Scientific American* seems to show the truth of this.

III. Reflection upon other considerations shows that there is no doubt about the inadequacy of our defenses.

IV. Some opinions of the opponents of increased armament must be considered.

V. Secretary Bryan's high-sounding statement of confidence in our armament as it is hardly seems justified.

While it is beyond doubt true that an "armament race" causes hard feeling, adequate protection is not militarism, and we must stand prepared to protect this country and its colonies from invasion; and we must do so by a well-trained force, instead of sacrificing the lives of our small present army and the thousands of untrained recruits, by poor equipment and training.

[This outline is by a high-school student; and although it can be improved, it illustrates the arrangement to be followed.]

(6) Bring the general view of your topic to class tomorrow for inspection.

When these outlines come in, examine them and hand them back to the class immediately. The instructor can examine about twenty such outlines in an hour. That is, he can note the points which here require attention, leaving the others to their places in the further development of the work. Here he needs to judge only the unity of the outline and the coherence and massing of the points. In other words, see that the points of development really belong to the topic, that they are in good order, and that there is real verbal or thought articulation, or both, of one point with another. Attention to these things means that the teacher is seeking to impress the outstanding essentials first.

SECOND ASSIGNMENT

The instructor has given each outline a brief examination and handed it back to the student, who has been looking on while the instructor marked his paper. At the close of the lesson period, assignment is made as follows:

(1) Rearrange your topics where necessary. (2) Study these revised outlines, preparing for a brief oral explanation of the ground you intend to cover. Three or four minutes will be allowed each student. (3) Bring a copy of the outline to the instructor. (4) General suggestion: Keep a copy of all work handed in.

For the manner of hearing the reports, see the *English Journal*, June, 1914, pp. 354-61. It is very important that one observe the procedure explained there. Also, let me here emphasize again that the reports should be kept as informal in the manner of delivery as

is possible. One should tell beginners to "recite" on their themes, and not to "speak." That they are "speaking" will no doubt dawn pleasantly upon them after the period of diffidence is by.

THIRD AND FOURTH ASSIGNMENTS

At the end of the lesson period in which the second assignment is completed, assign the following:

(1) Prepare and hand in a *detailed* outline of the *first* main point in the theme. (2) Study it so that you can recite upon it. (3) All main points must be stated so that they will stand out unmistakably as such. (4) Be sure to articulate the discussion of each point with that of the point preceding; e.g., "Yesterday I discussed [a certain point]; today I shall explain further [the next point]." Then proceed with the introduction of the point for the day.

Proceed in like manner with the other assignments, making a day's work out of the development of each main topic. Coming to the last topic, which for convenience we shall call the Fifth Assignment, proceed as follows:

FIFTH ASSIGNMENT

(1) Prepare the detailed outline of your last point in the development and of the *summary of your whole theme*. (2) Study the outline for oral recitation as heretofore, making sure that you are ready to give an oral summary of the whole theme at the same time.

By insisting upon a summary of the whole theme and upon definite articulation of each day's work with that preceding, one insures that the student shall feel a sense of continuity in treatment which otherwise might be lost. In the foregoing procedure, the teacher receives the outlines in short instalments. Consequently, he can grade each day's work over night, as it is handed in. Hence, after the recitation on the fifth assignment, he has only the last section of the outline to cover. The next day he can return this and the preceding sections of this detailed outline. For this "next day" he can make the following assignment:

SIXTH ASSIGNMENT

(1) Tomorrow we shall discuss the complete outlines, embracing all the work handed in, with a view to revision. (2) Look over the copies of all work handed in, having first placed them in order, so as to have your complete outlines in mind.

When the students first come to class after this assignment, hand back the corrected written work in order, so that each student has all his written work on the theme of his discussion before him, with mistakes marked and corrections suggested. Then have the class members start revising their outlines, allowing the students to come to the teacher for help when they need it. I have found no method to interest students so well in revision as this personal supervision. Having seen that each student has oriented himself concerning this revision, make the next assignment.

SEVENTH ASSIGNMENT

(1) Complete the revision of these outlines and write the whole theme from them. (2) Hand in the outline and the theme.

Read the written themes and grade them, using the outlines for reference where they are needed.

SUPPLEMENTARY CONSIDERATIONS

1. If the instructor wishes to have written work come oftener, he may, on any day during the oral development, have the students write the development of the day's subtopic in class instead of speaking it. This gives him opportunity to distribute his reading, and at the same time promotes facility in writing, as well as in oral explanation, on the part of the student. Let it not be thought that the mingling of oral and written work in one theme will break the continuity of tone in the development, either in the class work or in the final writing of the whole from the completed outline. This very mingling rather promotes continuity of tone, by removing the conventionally strong demarkation between speaking and writing. Moreover, if in writing the whole theme, the students come to subtopics already written out, they must read through them to be able to go on to the writing of those not written out, so that there is little danger of breaking the tone of the composition in the written work proper.

2. It may be objected that this method takes much time, that the student must be trained to write as well as to speak. All well and good, but there is written work for each bit of the oral; and then there is the writing of the whole theme at the end of the

plan. Besides, there is no assumption that oral work is to obviate the necessity for training in writing. However, I say this method provides for training in both oral and written work and makes both easier to teach. If the teacher wishes to give training in separate written work, let him do it after the student has learned the essentials of form through the far more economical method explained in this and my previous article. The fact that this part of the work is so carefully done, or that so much time is given to it, leads to two valuable considerations:

a) Intensive work on a type theme has impressed the form of outline and discourse upon the mind of the student.

b) For the teacher, this will shorten the labor of future assignment; for the student, it will accelerate the development of subsequent topics.

3. It will be noted that this is an explanation of the way to proceed in *beginning* the study of oral composition in the longer theme. If the teacher wishes to go on, he should mark out for himself this general trend of instruction:

a) First, use the close correlation of oral and written work, as herein indicated.

b) Secondly, proceed to the purely oral work, requiring always, however, that on the day of each theme an outline of it be given to the teacher. Such compositions, to be sure, will require more than three or four minutes in recitation. Here the instructor need not think that the students who are not reciting will have little to do. They ought always to be sufficiently interested in the topic under discussion to form a most appreciative audience, as well as a most helpful group of critics. It needs hardly to be said that each oral theme heard carries its impression of form and arrangement to the minds of the hearers; therefore, although the class might seem to be idling, it is really learning faster than the teacher beginning with oral work might think. *Consequently, if it takes several periods to complete an assignment of this sort, there is no time lost; time may even be gained, through the revision of undelivered work induced by the teacher's suggestions on the delivered work.*

c) Thirdly, proceed to purely written work. There will come a time, of course, when one must do this, simply to get at the minutiae

of polish in expression. I would make this suggestion: Many of the minor faults are removed by the means mentioned in my article of June, 1914. For the removal of the remaining ones, reserve what time is necessary, having given to purely oral expression all the time possible. Never assume that a certain nicety of expression cannot be attained in the oral work. One may satisfy himself of this by comparing one of the first of the correlated themes (see Supplementary Considerations, 3, *a*, and the main article preceding) with one of the later ones, or with one of the first in the purely written work.

4. This method gives the student direct supervision of his oral, and of much of his written, work; that is, supervision and aid when he needs it, while he is trying to express himself.